

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable James R. Schlesinger
The Secretary of Defense

SUBJECT: Concepts of Warning

1. My problems with General Goodpaster's thoughtful 28 May letter are of two different orders: one conceptual, the other pragmatic. Your equally thoughtful undated response (it is not clear to me whether it is a draft or was sent) partially rectifies the conceptual problem, though not entirely so, and does not address the pragmatic one which bothers me.

2. On the conceptual point, I think General Goodpaster misperceives or misconstrues the key concept of "warning time" in a way that throws the analytic extension of his eminently sound instincts perceptibly out of focus. He clearly feels, and explicitly asserts, that this concept carries an "implied expectation that demonstrable proof will be available that an adversary has the intent to go to war." In my view, not only is no such implication necessarily contained in a properly perceived concept of "warning time", but -- instead -- the concept cannot be properly articulated or understood without ^{the} corollary that,

frequently, such proof will not be available because (almost by definition) in many instances it simply cannot exist. You are on the right track in your concern about "overattempts to quantify warning as the time prior to D-day instead of the time following a Pact M-day." Even this formulation, however, conflates certain key ideas that I believe need to be kept conceptually distinct.

3. The root logical problem in General Goodpaster's approach is an unexamined assumption of a one-dimensional schema, the assumption that there is necessarily a serial sequence -- temporal as well as logical -- from "intent" to "capabilities"; i.e., that augmented capabilities perforce flow from and represent an articulated implementation of a firm prior "intent" -- a decision to initiate hostilities. This may be true in some cases. It was probably true in the case of, say, Hitler's attack on Poland in 1939. In many other cases, however, this is not the way things work, e.g. (probably) the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

4. In the real world, the linear sequence from intent/decision to capability augmentation/implementation is a limiting special case. Often an augmentation of capabilities reflects a prudential desire to keep options open and/or make certain options -- including initiating hostilities -- practically viable during the decision process, not after the decision is made. The decision to exercise those augmented capabilities may be made very late in the game (with a decision/action time span compressed into hours)

augmenting capabilities initiates of itself a dynamic process that comes to dictate the decision, which is what essentially happened during July 1914.

5. The point here is that intelligence will often not be able to provide "demonstrable proof" that an adversary "has the intent," i.e., has made the decision, to go to war -- not because intelligence is deficient (as, unfortunately, is sometimes the case) -- but because the decision has not been made, hence no such proof can be available.

6. Obviously, intelligence must try to pipe into and keep abreast of a putative adversary's decision-making deliberations. This is our optimum goal. But the most useful service intelligence will normally be able to provide -- and deserves to be held accountable for providing -- is that of flagging early on a change in the political climate in which the initiation of hostilities becomes one of the alternative options under serious consideration by a putative adversary.

7. It is in this context that I think the hoary and sometimes overly simplistic "intentions/capabilities" distinction ought to be viewed. Those sentences and paragraphs of your (draft?) response which deal with capabilities alone are right on the money. Before large scale hostilities can be initiated, there are certain preparatory actions that have to be taken and taking them does require a measurable amount of time. We do need to focus better on the changes in pact capabilities, do need to evolve a better check list -- an amber/red light board if you will -- and do need to sharpen our estimates of the timing of such changes in

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Pact posture or preparations will normally require and the minimum time span into which they can be physically compressed.

8. Granting all the above, however, we still need to remember that capability augmentation can precede and does not necessarily follow firm intent, i.e., decision to attack. Decisions can be and often are made incrementally and even conditionally. In November/December 1941, for example, the Japanese government was mentally and psychologically prepared to go to war with the United States; but the orders given to the task force which attacked Pearl Harbor were conditional ones up to the very last minute. The task force was not to attack unless U.S. battleships and carriers were in port; and since the carriers were out, the attack was almost aborted. Had the battleships also been taken out of Pearl Harbor for any reason, there would have been no attack on 7 December; even though war between the U.S. and Japan would undoubtedly have broken out within the next few months.

9. The importance of having intelligence focus on "warning" in the sense of spotting changes in a political climate is two-fold: First, this approach runs with the grain of the way events often or even normally evolve. Second, and even more important, this approach maximizes the leadtime available to the political decision makers whom the intelligence process was established to serve. If the latter do not have unrealistic expectations of or requirements for "proof" of a positive enemy decision to initiate hostilities but, instead, are willing to heed warnings that the climate has changed to the point where initiation of hostilities can be considered a serious option by a putative adversary, the

decision
/makers' time for deliberation and preemptive response would be greatly lengthened.

10. This consideration leads to my pragmatic problem with some of General Goodpaster's argument. Though it is clearly necessary for a commander not to be caught short by enemy preparations, it is also necessary to remain prudentially sensitive to the inherent dangers of ping pong escalation. A potential adversary who is augmenting capabilities to keep his options open can be spooked into an attack decision by matching counter-preparations, which he can read as evidence of your prior decision to go to war. This was also a feature of the events of July 1914 which armed the guns of August.

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Remarks:

Attached for your information is an informal, personal note I wrote at Jim Schlesinger's request and gave him at our session on 4 September. The DCI has a copy. Schlesinger said he concurred in this approach and wanted to pursue the matter further in future conversations. It was after reading this note that he asked me to talk to General Goodpaster and told General Wickham to arrange for Goodpaster to come to Langley to discuss the warning question.

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George A. Carver, Jr. D/DCI/NIO

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